



OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

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MEMORANDUM FOR SECRETARIES OF THE MILITARY DEPARTMENTS
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DIRECTORS OF THE DEFENSE AGENCIES
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Subject: Mental Health Counseling and Treatment and Security Clearances

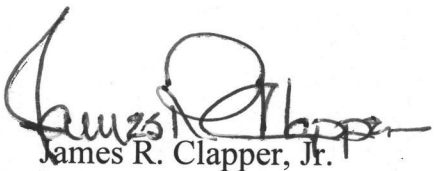
In April 2008, we issued a joint memorandum to all Department of Defense (DoD) personnel reaffirming the Department's strong endorsement that personnel should "seek professional help to address all health-related concerns, either mental or physical." The purpose of this memorandum is to reiterate that counseling and treatment for mental or physical health, in and of itself, is not a reason to deny or revoke a security clearance. Indeed, many types of mental health counseling and treatment, to include treatment which results from being the victim of a crime, such as rape or sexual assault, are usually not a concern with regard to security clearances.

Unfortunately, DoD civilian personnel and Service members still sometimes avoid or delay seeking mental health counseling or treatment because they are concerned that doing so will jeopardize their security clearance. Some feel embarrassed that others will find out about their mental health problems or fear that seeking help now will cause personnel security officials and commanders to question their judgment or stability later. This concern reflects a misunderstanding of the reason personnel are asked about their mental health history on security clearance applications. Personnel security officials are responsible for identifying applicants with mental or personality disorders which are likely to cause behavior that endangers security. In doing so, they must also distinguish this group of applicants from those cases where an individual's reasons for seeking mental health counseling and treatment do not constitute a valid security concern.

Executive Order 12968, *Access to Classified Information*, states that "no negative inference concerning eligibility for access to classified information may be made solely on the basis of mental health counseling." Adjudicators must adhere to uniform national adjudicative guidelines when evaluating information concerning mental health counseling. Seeking professional care for mental health issues is a positive course of action that, by itself, will not jeopardize a security clearance. On the contrary, failure to

seek care when needed actually increases the likelihood that psychological distress may escalate to a more serious mental condition, which in turn could cause behaviors that would be of security concern. Through the training programs they provide, leaders, security professionals, counselors, and victim advocates must encourage personnel to seek treatment and counseling for issues that affect mental health and must also reinforce the idea that utilization of mental health treatment options is a positive course of action. Education is crucial to dispelling the myths and removing the stigma associated with seeking professional help.

The attachment provides answers to some frequently asked questions regarding mental health counseling and treatment as they relate to security clearances. Again, we encourage all employees to seek care when needed, regardless of the issue, knowing that getting professional assistance is the best way to maintain optimal individual performance and sustain our Nation's security.



James R. Clapper, Jr.
Under Secretary of Defense for
Intelligence



Gail H. McGinn
Performing the Duties of the
Under Secretary of Defense for
Personnel and Readiness

Attachment:
As stated

Frequently Asked Questions

1. If I seek mental health counseling or treatment for a condition that is not excluded from being reported on question 21 of the Standard Form 86 Questionnaire for National Security Positions (SF 86), how will it affect the decision on whether to grant or renew my security clearance?

Your decision to seek counseling or treatment is viewed as a positive sign that you recognize a problem may exist and are willing to take steps towards resolving it. Early intervention is often a key to successful resolution. On the other hand, letting your mental health problem grow until your behavior endangers security may lead to a negative decision on your clearance.

2. If I have received counseling or treatment from a mental health professional for reasons other than the exclusions listed on question 21 of the SF 86, what happens when I am investigated or reinvestigated for my security clearance?

You will have to report the counseling or treatment on your personnel security questionnaire (the SF 86). During an interview, the background investigator will ask standard questions about the length and reasons for your mental health counseling or treatment and its outcomes.

3. Does it make a difference if I enter this counseling or treatment voluntarily, without it being required by a supervisor or court?

Yes. Voluntarily seeking help is a definite plus in the later decision by personnel security officials regarding whether to grant or renew your security clearance. The fact that you have voluntarily sought counseling or treatment for a mental health problem does not suggest that your problem is more serious than someone who has not. Instead, it shows that you are aware of the problem and are trying to deal with it in a responsible manner. This voluntary action is considered positive evidence of reliability and a willingness to fulfill personnel security responsibilities. When the investigation results are later reviewed to make a security clearance decision, the fact that you voluntarily sought professional help will be a significant positive factor in the decision.

4. How do I get help if I have a problem that requires mental health counseling or treatment?

You can receive quick professional help by contacting the Employee Assistance Program (EAP), Military One Source, or Counseling Services that are offered at your workplace. These free government-sponsored programs can assist you in finding a local mental health professional who can help you with your mental health problem. If an EAP is not available, you can seek help from mental health professionals located in your local area.